

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education**



Testimony before the Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee of the Whole  
Thursday, March 5, 2009

**“Performance Oversight Hearing on the FY 2008-2009 Budget of the Office of  
the Deputy Mayor for Education”**

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee. I appear before you today to discuss the performance of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education during the past year. I am pleased to report that my office is making significant progress and that we look forward to continuing our efforts to improve educational opportunities for District residents.

The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) is organized around four main functions: acting as chief advisor to the Mayor on the District’s education strategy; coordinating across educational institutions and city agencies to improve child and youth outcomes; developing

partnerships in support of public education initiatives; and providing leadership, oversight, and support for the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM), and the Office of the Ombudsman.

### *ICSIC*

As I shared with you last spring, the major work of the DME over the past year has centered on initiatives associated with the Interagency Collaboration and Services Integration Commission, ICSIC. Our efforts have been intense and working to make progress on so many fronts at once is challenging; yet we are absolutely making progress. We completed an independent annual evaluation of the ICSIC programs, which we transmitted to the Council at the beginning of the year, and early results are very promising.

This school year we have successfully implemented the DC START multidisciplinary early intervention program. We hired seven social worker clinicians, who are serving students at six District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) elementary schools and one middle school. They receive extensive supervision and training, and function as important members of the school staff. Thus far, the evidence-based model is showing impressive signs of success. I would like to share the following brief case study as an example of the kind of work the DC START program is doing.

Derek (not his real name) is thirteen years old. He was referred to the DC START program by his teacher for the following behavioral observations:

- Problems controlling his anger, physically assaulting students and adults (including his mother)
- Frequent tantrums
- Ignoring teacher's repeated warnings

- Constant need to be in control
- Trouble sitting still
- Exhibiting sad affect

After meeting with Derek and his mother for the initial assessment, the DC START clinician learned that Derek had experienced numerous traumas throughout his childhood, including immigration; witnessing domestic violence; an abusive father with alcohol abuse symptoms; witnessing inappropriate sexual acts; and the separation of his parents.

Because of Derek's age and high intellectual ability (as reported by his teachers), the clinician applied Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Derek enthusiastically participated in all 24 sessions (including 3 additional that were extended when regression was noticed in correlation with new family issues). During the sessions, the clinician and student addressed his feelings of anger, sadness and powerlessness through innovative ways such as art, games, books and dance. They also worked on self-identity and cultural assimilation.

- Derek has progressed substantially since the time of his referral. He has become increasingly more able to verbalize his feelings and has learned new ways to appreciate his culture, which once a cause of shame.
- His mother and the clinician have established a strong relationship – the mother utilizes the clinician as a therapeutic support and advocate for her family in matters of housing, custody, and community resources. She has expressed much gratitude for the growth she has seen in Derek and the positive interactions they now have.
- Derek's teacher has also noted that he is better able to recognize and correct his impulsive behaviors and has taken on a positive leadership role in the classroom.

We strongly believe in the DC START model and its comprehensive approach to early intervention. Of particular importance is the family outreach component of the program. Clinicians have assisted parents and families with finding employment, addressing housing issues, and seeking help with financial, health, and substance abuse issues. By connecting the wellness of the home to the wellness of the child in the classroom, we aim to take early intervention services to a new level.

In addition to DC START, ICSIC has implemented four other evidence-based programs this year:

- Second Step, a violence prevention curriculum teachers can utilize that addresses aggressive behaviors and emphasizes positive peer interactions and social competency;
- Life Skills, an alcohol- and substance-abuse prevention program being taught by health and physical education teachers in elementary and middle schools;
- School Resource Officer (SRO) training, a program designed to train Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) school resource officers in research-based techniques and practices based on the community policing model in order to improve school safety and climate and the relationship among safety officers, school staff, and students; and
- Primary Project, a school-based early intervention program being implemented by the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to address social and emotional needs of children in pre-kindergarten through first grade as they transition into school.

Combining Second Step, Life Skills, and DC START, we are serving over 5,500 students at 50 schools. Adding in SRO and Primary Project training, over 300 DCPS, MPD, and DMH staff working in schools have been trained in the past eight months. My office works steadily on monitoring the programs and their implementation, reaching out to school-based staff, and problem-solving to ensure that the programs are utilized effectively and have the maximum positive impact on students and families.

Finally, we continue to work across agencies through ICSIC to improve outcomes related to health, student achievement, youth engagement, and transition to adulthood. Highlights of the past year include:

- With a committee comprised of representatives of DCPS, Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), Child and Youth Investment Trust Corporation (CYITC), and community-based organizations, there is a new, improved structure for out-of-school-time (OST) programs, ensuring that every DCPS has a quality OST program that matches the needs of the school community.
- Led by the DME, an interagency working group developed plans this past summer to support and encourage smooth transitions for consolidating schools and student populations. Safe passage to school, programs and events for student and family integration, and overall school culture improvements were our main focus.
- Leveraging the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) grant awarded to the District last year, we are placing emergency-safety flipchart books in every school classroom in the District, and every public school has developed a school emergency plan.
- The Department of Human Services (DHS) is working with ICSIC agencies to organize a “Connect Event,” which will target TANF recipients and non-custodial parents with child support arrearages. The event will link parents to a case coordinator, who will help him or her access the District’s services – including adult literacy and vocational training programs through partnerships with other District agencies. Participants will also be linked to existing public benefits for which they are eligible.

### *Education Strategy*

The DME has also worked diligently over the past year on a wide range of strategies and initiatives related to the Mayor's overall education reform efforts. Last year I told the Council about our work with DCPS on the development of an alternative high school model. That school, the Youth Engagement Academy, opened this school year and is serving 50 at-risk students. My office has continued the work in this area in close support of the DCPS Office of Youth Engagement, coordinating with OSSE and external partners to develop additional policy and program recommendations. We expect to finalize plans for the next school year in the coming weeks.

Also, we continue to coordinate facilities planning for excess school buildings. Working with the Office of Property Management (OPM), we conducted a Request for Offers for public charter schools and are engaged in further discussion regarding offers from four charter schools.

Additionally, we are working with OPM and the Office of the Deputy Mayor of Economic Development (DMPED) to identify effective agency uses and solicit ideas for development that will bring services and positive impacts to the neighborhoods around the schools. This has been a challenging ongoing project; ultimately, the Mayor seeks to identify the best use of facilities that meets the needs of the community and is feasible to implement.

Other highlights of our work include:

- Sponsorship of a feasibility study for a community college and research with OSSE, the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), and external partners regarding the development of community college opportunities for District residents.
- Development of a plan to expand access to adult career technical training programs on evenings and weekends later this year.
- Coordination between DCPS and OSSE teams around special education priorities, focusing on tracking our progress toward meeting the objectives of court consent decrees and problem-solving for implementation issues across agencies.
- Assisting with the revision of Title 5 of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations, providing project management and legal drafting capacity to DCPS and OSSE as needed.
- Coordination of the 2008 Mayor's Buff and Scrub Initiative, along with OPEFM and DMPED – partnering 121 businesses with 35 schools to complete minor facilities repairs and clean-ups.

### *Ombudsman*

The Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education serves residents of the District with high quality Ombudsman and mediation services. To date, the Ombudsman has dealt with 893 cases. Of those cases, 74% were by phone, 11% were referred by the Mayor's office, 9% were by email, and 6% were walk-ins. The overwhelming majority of the cases deal with DCPS. As an additional service, the Ombudsman staff has been able to apply their training and expertise to

assist DCPS and charter schools in outreach and workshops regarding conflict resolution, violence prevention, and positive culture building in schools and communities.

We are taking a close look at the data over the past year to learn more about the kinds of cases the Ombudsman office encounters and how those cases are managed and resolved. Increasing public awareness of the services the Ombudsman provides is another area we are looking to improve. Finally, I'd like to note that we have an interim Ombudsman in place who is working hard to ensure that the excellent performance of the Ombudsman office continues.

#### *OSSE and OPEFM Oversight*

Both the Office of the State Superintendent of Education and the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization will have their own oversight hearings, so I will only speak briefly of their work as it relates to my office. I have been working closely with State Superintendent Gist to move OSSE beyond the first year transition, which they have completed successfully, to a high quality state partner in improving the District's public education system. In the areas of accountability, special education, grants reform, and student data systems, I monitor OSSE activities and priorities closely, and provide capacity and direction as necessary.

The DME also has actively worked with OPEFM and DCPS over the past several months on the 2008 Master Facilities Plan, which we look forward to Council acting favorably upon. With this plan and OPEFM's demonstrated performance over the past year, I am confident that we will dramatically improve the learning environment for every DCPS student in the next five years – this is an incredibly exciting challenge that requires balancing careful planning with flexibility to

adapt to meet the needs of each school and the school system as a whole. Based on our track record, I am confident that we will meet the Mayor's objectives and restore the pride of our community in our school facilities.

This concludes my written testimony. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Council, for the opportunity to discuss the performance of the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education over the past fiscal year. I am happy to answer any questions.